AMENDMENTS

In the Claims:

Amend the claims as indicated hereafter.

1. (Currently Amended) A forward error correction communication system, comprising:

a forward error correction (FEC) module configured to define a plurality of FEC code words, each of the FEC code words having a plurality characters and each of the characters having a plurality of bits; and

a transmission module configured to interleave the FEC code words across multiple communication connections such that, for each respective FEC code word, characters of ~~each of the plurality of~~ said each respective FEC code ~~words~~ word are transmitted across ~~different~~ multiple ones of the communication ~~connections,~~ connections and such that characters of said each respective FEC code word that are transmitted over the same communication connection are separated by at least one character of another of the FEC code words but bits of the same character of said each respective FEC code word are successively transmitted over the same communication connection without any intervening bits from other characters, wherein each of the communication connections is communicatively coupled to a remote receiving unit.

2. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 1, wherein the transmission module is configured to ensure that ~~approximately~~ m/n characters of at least one of the code words are transmitted across each of the communication connections, wherein m corresponds to a total number of characters for the at least one code word and n corresponds to a total number of the communication connections.

3. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein each of the communication connections is a digital subscriber line.

4. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein each of the communication connections couples the transmission module to a network.

5. (Original) The system of claim 1, further comprising a network coupled to each of the communication connections, the network configured to route the FEC code words from the communication connections to the remote receiving unit.

6. (Currently Amended) A forward error correction communication system, comprising:

a forward error correction (FEC) module configured to define a plurality of FEC code words, each of the FEC code words having a plurality of characters and each of the characters having a plurality of bits, the plurality of FEC code words including a first FEC code word and a second FEC code word; and

a transmission module configured to transmit the FEC code words to a remote receiving unit via a plurality of communication connections, the transmission module configured to ensure that characters of the first FEC code ~~words~~ word are transmitted across ~~different~~ multiple ones of the communication connections and that characters of the second FEC code word are transmitted across multiple ones of the communication connections, the transmission module configured to ensure that a first character from the first FEC code word is separated from a second character of

the first FEC code word by at least a character of the second FEC code word when the first and second characters are transmitted over one of the communication connections, said transmission module further configured to transmit the first FEC code word such that bits of the first character are successively transmitted over the one communication connection without any intervening bits from other characters.

7. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 6, wherein the transmission module is configured to ensure that ~~approximately~~ m/n characters of at least one of the code words are transmitted across each of the communication connections, wherein m corresponds to a total number of characters for the at least one code word and n corresponds to a total number of the communication connections.

8. (Original) The system of claim 6, wherein each of the communication connections is a digital subscriber line.

9. (Original) The system of claim 6, wherein each of the communication connections couples the transmission module to a network.

10. (Currently Amended) A forward error correction communication system comprising:

memory for storing a plurality of forward error correction (FEC) code words, each of the FEC code words having a plurality of characters and each of the characters having a plurality of bits; and

means for transmitting the FEC code words to a receiving unit via a plurality of communication connections that are communicatively coupled to the receiving unit, the transmitting means configured to ensure that, for each respective FEC code word, characters of ~~each of the~~ said each respective FEC code ~~words~~ word are transmitted across ~~different~~ multiple ones of the communication connections, the transmitting means configured to ensure that characters of said each respective FEC code word that are transmitted along the same communication connection are interleaved with characters from at least one other FEC code word, the transmitting means further configured to ensure that, for each respective character of the FEC code words, bits of said each respective character are not separated by bits of other characters when transmitted across the communication connections.

11. (Currently Amended) A method for communicating forward error correction code words, comprising the steps of:

transmitting a plurality of forward error correction (FEC) code words across a plurality of communication connections to a remote receiving unit, each of the FEC code words having a plurality of characters and each of the characters having a plurality of bits; and

for each respective FEC code word, ensuring that characters of ~~each of the~~ said each respective FEC code ~~words~~ word are transmitted across ~~different~~ multiple ones of the communication connections via the transmitting step and ensuring that characters of said each respective FEC code word that are transmitted along the same communication connection are interleaved with characters from at least one other FEC code word;

wherein the transmitting step comprises the step of, for each respective character of the FEC code words, successively transmitting bits of said each respective character such that said bits are not separated by bits of other characters.

12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the ensuring step comprises the step of ensuring that ~~approximately~~ m/n characters of at least one of the code words are transmitted across each of the communication connections, wherein m corresponds to a total number of characters for the at least one code word and n corresponds to a total number of the communication connections.

13. (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein each of the communication connections is a digital subscriber line.

14. (Currently Amended) A method for communicating forward error correction code words, comprising the steps of:

defining a plurality of forward error correction (FEC) code words, each of the FEC code words having a plurality of characters and each of the characters having a plurality of bits, the plurality of FEC code words including a first FEC code word and a second FEC code word; and

interleaving the plurality of FEC code words across a plurality of communication connections such that characters of ~~each of~~ the first code ~~words~~ word are transmitted across ~~different~~ multiple ones of the communication connections and such that characters of the first FEC code word are separated by characters from the second FEC code word but bits of each respective character of the first FEC code word are not separated by bits of other characters.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the interleaving step comprises the step of ensuring that ~~approximately~~ m/n characters of at least one of the code words are transmitted across each of the communication connections, wherein m corresponds to a total number of characters for the at least one code word and n corresponds to a total number of the communication connections.

16. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein each of the communication connections is a digital subscriber line.

17. (New) The method of claim 14, wherein all of the bits of at least one character of the first FEC code word are transmitted across a single one of the communication connections.

18. (New) The system of claim 1, wherein all of the bits for at least one character of the FEC code words are transmitted across a single one of the communication connections.

19. (New) The system of claim 6, wherein all of the bits of the first and second characters are transmitted across the one communication connection.

20. (New) The method of claim 11, wherein all of the bits for at least one character of the FEC code words are transmitted across a single one of the communication connections.